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CLOTHES MOTHS WORK FOR HITLER

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A radio talk by Ruth Van Deman, Bureau of Home Economics, broadcast in the Department of Agriculture's portion of the National Farm and Home Hour, Thursday, February 12, 1942, by stations associated with the Blue Net Work.

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BAKER:

Here in Washington is Ruth Van Deman, of the Bureau of Home Economics to bring us more news on the home front. And Ruth has a guest today ----

VAN DEMAN:

Wait a minute, John. Haven't you heard about the value of surprise. I'd like to keep our guest up my sleeve for a few moments---until the time becomes appropriate to wave the magic wand and produce him.

BAKER:

Hadn't realized your sleeves were so large----or that you were a magician. But anyhow---you're going to talk about one of the members of the enemy air force----

VAN DEMAN:

That's right----a member of the enemy air force who's working behind our own lines----right in our own homes, in fact, engaged in sly, sneaking sabotage of some valuable materials that are important to the nation's war effort.

BAKER:

That makes an awfully ominous build-up for a tiny little thing like a clothes moth.

VAN DEMAN:

It may be a tiny little thing, but a clothes moth is a destructive little beast----and in these days when we need millions of pounds of wool for the army and navy and marine corps, and when our total supply of wool is limited, we need to take care of the woolen things we have now---and make sure they last as long as possible.

BAKER:

Let 'em wear out---instead of being eaten out, by moths.

VAN DEMAN:

Yes--only of course the wearing out---we hope---will be a long, slow process. But so far as the moths are concerned---every clothes moth is working for Hitler and Hirohito---and ought to be treated like the enemy he is.

BAKER:

Well, I hold a personal grudge against clothes moths---because a couple of weeks ago I got out a pair of pants I hadn't worn for a while---they weren't new pants---but they're my favorite old ones----and I found a nice little crescent shaped hole--about a half inch long in one leg.

(OVER)

VAN DEMAN:

That calls to mind the jingle that goes----

How doth the busy little moth
Improve each shining minute
By hunting up your winter coat
And laying egglets in it.

BAKER:

I've heard better poetry. I'm glad it was a pair of old pants ---- instead of a winter coat ----that the moths worked on. But you know---the thing that surprised me was that the moths were working in winter time. I thought they only worked in warm weather---on your winter clothes.

VAN DEMAN:

No---I think they-----but right here, John, is where I'd like to wave the magic wand I spoke of, and bring forth a man who probably knows more about clothes moths and their habits and how to control them---than anyone else. Dr. E. A. Back, of the Bureau of Entomology and Plant Quarantine.

BAKER:

You know---this is an historic occasion. On one program we have the man who knows most about clothes moths---meaning Dr. Back---and the man who knows least about them---meaning me.

VAN DEMAN:

Well, before Dr. Back is through maybe he'll remove your distinction of knowing least about clothes moths. But, Dr. Back, this question that Mr. Baker just raised---about moths working only in warm weather---that isn't true, is it?

BACK:

It is true that moths are not active when the temperature is below 50 degrees---but in the warm houses most of us live in these days---moths are at work the year around.

VAN DEMAN:

So---there, John, you have an explanation of the moth activity in your muchly prized trousers.

BAKER:

Well--it isn't exactly practical to keep clothes in the refrigerator. Dr. Back---what about clothes that you're wearing every day--or every few days. Will moths bother them?

BACK:

Not as a rule. Probably you know that the actual damage by moths is done--not by the moths which you see flying around, but by the larvae.

BAKER:

If I recall my entomology correctly, the moths lay eggs---and the eggs hatch into larvae---tiny little caterpillars. And these caterpillars are the rascals that eat holes in overcoats and suits---and my pants.

BACK:

That's correct. The eggs are rather delicate and tender, and probably will be broken when the clothing is worn. Moths stay away from light as much as possible, too----so the clothing you need to worry about most is that which is hung away in a dark closet or stored in a trunk or box and remains undisturbed for several weeks or months at a time.

VAN DEMAN:

And of course that applies to furs, feathers, mohair upholstery, rugs and similar articles which are in storage, doesn't it, Dr. Back?

BACK:

Yes, moths will work on almost any of the animal fibers.

BAKER:

Well, you can't wear all your clothes all the time---what can you do to keep moths out of clothes that you want to put away?

VAN DEMAN:

One very practical and timely problem, of course, is storing overcoats and winter woollens for summer. If I'm not mistaken, Dr. Back, one of your recommendations is to brush and air all the things thoroughly before they're stored---to destroy the moth eggs and larvae.

BACK:

Yes---that's very helpful---and dry cleaning kills the moth larvae and eggs. Then, if the garments can be sealed in paper bags or wrapped in paper and sealed, there should be no danger of moths getting in.

BAKER:

Moths won't go through paper?

BACK:

That's correct.

BAKER:

What about mothballs--and chemicals like naphthalene and PDB?

BACK:

Mothballs usually are made of naphthalene or a combination of naphthalene and paradichlorobenzene. As they evaporate, these chemicals give off a gas which kills the moth larvae if it's concentrated enough. Most people don't use enough mothballs to get any good from them.

VAN DEMAN:

And the clothes need to be in a tight box or trunk, or in a closet that can be tightly closed. I believe a gasketed door is what Dr. Back recommends in his leaflet on Clothes Moths.

BAKER:

You mean---putting any of that stuff in an open closet---one that you're using every day---doesn't do any good?

BACK: Practically none---because the gas escapes. To protect clothing that you're wearing frequently, brush it and air it often. To protect articles that you want to store---put them in a tight chest or container of some kind and use PDB as you call it, or naphthalene. In an ordinary trunk or chest it's a good idea to overdose, and use one pound of the crystals. In a storage closet, use a pound of crystals to each hundred cubic feet.

VAN DEMAN:

John--I don't know when I've seen you taking notes during a broadcast----

BAKER:

This is important; the moths may come back for the coat that matches those pants of mine. Dr. Back--what about a cedar chest?

BACK:

A cedar chest that is made of at least 70 percent solid red cedar is a good protector, provided the garments are thoroughly brushed before they are put in the chest--and provided the chest is tightly closed.

BAKER:

At least 70 percent red cedar-----

VAN DEMAN:

John--a good many homemakers have saved themselves a lot of trouble by studying the Department's leaflet on clothes moths. Dr. Back wrote it-----

BAKER:

Well--then it probably has in it all the things he's been telling us.

VAN DEMAN:

Of course it does---and more too. And I made sure that there's a plentiful supply on hand--and the Bureau of Entomology and Plant Quarantine will be glad to send a copy to anyone who wants it. Leaflet 145.

BAKER:

Then---the rest is easy. Farm and Home Friends, if you'd like to have some help on fighting clothes moths, send a postcard to the Bureau of Entomology, Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C. Ask for a copy of Leaflet 145--on Clothes Moths.

And thanks to you, Dr. Back, for all your information---and thanks to you, Ruth Van Deman, for bringing the source of our information.